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UNCLAS ROME 001400

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SUBJECT: INVASIVE SPECIES: STILL AN EXOTIC PRIORITY IN ITALY

REF: 01 STATE 66205

1. ON MAY 2, 2001, SCICOUNS DELIVERED A COPY OF THE U.S. NATIONAL INVASIVES MANAGEMENT PLAN (REFTEL) TO PATRIZIA DE ANGELIS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF MOE NATURE CONSERVATION SERVICE.
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IN MID-MAY, DE ANGELIS TOLD US THAT INVASIVE SPECIES IS AN ISSUE OF GOI CONCERN, BUT AT LOW LEVEL OF PRIORITY. IN FACT, THE GOI RATIFIED BOTH THE BIODIVERSITY AND BERN CONVENTIONS - WHICH PROVIDE FOR CONTROL OF INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES - BUT IT DOES NOT HAVE SPECIFIC REGULATIONS OR AN ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THEM. MOREOVER, ITALY IS FAR BEHIND THE U.S. SINCE IT STILL HAS TO MAKE A COMPLETE LIST NOT ONLY OF ITS INVASIVE SPECIES BUT OF PLANT AND ANIMAL RESOURCES GENERALLY. DE ANGELIS PROMISED TO PASS THE U.S. PLAN TO HER OFFICE EXPERTS AND ORGANIZE A MEETING AS SOON AS THEY HAD REVIEWED IT.

2. CONFIRMING THE LOW LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THE TOPIC, DE ANGELIS AGREED TO MEET AGAIN ONLY IN DECEMBER 2001. SHE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PROF. PAOLO BLASI, PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN BOTANICAL SOCIETY. BLASI CONFIRMED THAT INVASIVE PLANTS PLAY A MINOR ROLE IN ITALY COMPARED TO NORTHERN EUROPE (15-20 PCT VS 40-50 PCT) DUE TO THE PROTECTIVE ROLE AND GREATER TEMPERATURE RANGE ASSOCIATED WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE. IN FACT, THE INGRESS OF ALIEN SPECIES ORIGINATING IN WARMER CLIMATES INSIDE THE INNER - AND THUS HOTTER - ZONES OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITIES WAS NOT IDENTIFIED IN LARGE MEDITERRANEAN CITIES IN ITALY, WHERE THE TEMPERATURES OF THE INNER CITY ARE STILL IN THE RANGE REQUIRED BY THE LOCAL SPECIES. HOWEVER, THE RELATIVE PROPORTION OF ALIEN SPECIES TENDS TO INCREASE ALONG WITH THE INCREASING LEVELS OF HUMAN IMPACT AND URBANIZATION, GENERALLY AS A RESULT OF CLEARING LAND FOR AGRICULTURE OR SETTLEMENTS, OR MORE LOCALLY, THE TRANSPLANTING OF EXOTIC PLANT MATERIALS INTO NATIVE GARDENS. IN ITALY, PALERMO (SICILY) HAS THE GREATEST NUMBER OF EXOTIC/ALIEN SPECIES, INVADERS COLLECTED INTO THE CITY'S
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BOTANICAL GARDEN.

3. BLASI ADDED THAT ITALY IS STILL CARRYING OUT A CENSUS OF ALIEN SPECIES IN THE ITALIAN FLORA, INVOLVING MORE THAN 20 ITALIAN UNIVERSITIES. HE ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT THE 2002 EUROPEAN MAN AND BIOSPHERE MEETING WOULD BE HELD ON OCTOBER 7-11 IN ROME. ITALY WILL PROPOSE INCLUDING ROME IN THE WORLD BIOSPHERE RESERVE LIST.

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